

“A recent report from the Kentucky Department for Public Health showed that more Kentuckians die from prescription drug overdoses than from car accidents.”

>> “With a physician, they have gotten to where they know exactly the line not to cross,” Carpenter said. “They ask certain questions, they require a Kentucky driver’s license, they run KASPER on their patients to make sure their patients aren’t doctor shopping — so they think they are taking all the correct steps. Well, then it takes us a while to actually conduct an investigation because you have to send undercover [officers] in there, you have to send confidential sources in there and try to get to where the doctor isn’t doing the exam. They may do just enough of an exam to where we can’t do anything about it criminally. That’s where the Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure would step in.”

West agreed.

“It takes a long time to actually prove the case,” he said. “Doctor cases aren’t easy to try. They take a long time and they absorb a lot of our resources, too. If a doctor has a medical license and a DEA number, he has a legitimate right to dispense medication. We have to prove it’s illegal what he’s doing. That standard of ‘outside the usual course of medical practice’ and ‘not for a legitimate medical purpose,’ it says ‘legitimate medical purpose.’ They can give it out for a medical purpose, it may not be legitimate. We only catch the guys who are way far into the bad conduct. A smart doctor running a pain clinic could do very well and we’d never be able to lay a hand on him.”

The education and prestige that normally accompanies a medical degree can intimidate officers faced with a possible

pill mill in their town, Carpenter said, but it shouldn’t.

“When these cases first started coming about, people would say, ‘Oh it’s a doctor, we’ll never be able to get them.’” Carpenter said. “Really, they’re just like a regular drug dealer. It just takes a lot more time to investigate it.”

These investigations can take a year or more to gather sufficient evidence to convict, but Carpenter said no one has to do it alone.

“The attorney general’s office and tactical diversion up here are very unique in that we can take the time and work these cases, we’re not responding to calls every day. Whereas a local police department, they don’t always have the time, resources, or training to work these kinds of cases. It takes lots of surveillance, you have to do background checks on the employees — a person who is on the up and up isn’t going to want to work in a place like this and be around those kind of people all the time. You have to check the background on the physician, interview some of the patients, try to get undercover officers in there or confidential sources work through them just to get into the doctor’s office. We’re very fortunate that we have the time to do it.

“Reaching out is a good place to start,” she continued. “It doesn’t mean I want your case. At least we can give you a little guidance on where to start.”

## THE SUFFERING

Pill mills are not a new problem and not one that is going to be easily solved. A lot of work has gone into slowing them down. Task forces have been created among law enforcement to investigate and shut down the offices. Gov. Steve Beshear appointed a panel of professionals to spot pill-pushing doctors. Legislators at press time were reviewing emergency legislation in hopes of

